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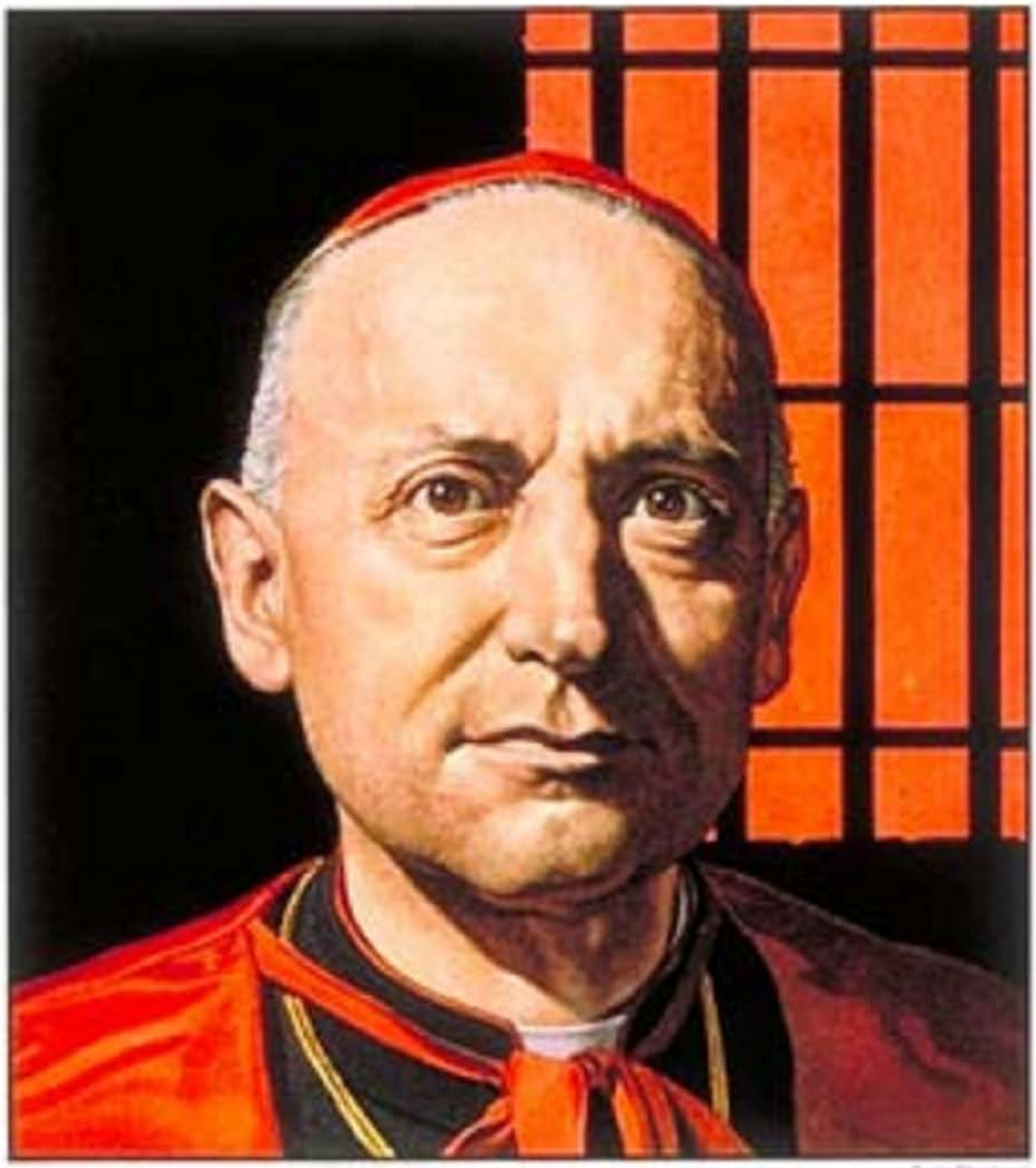


By a Cincinnati

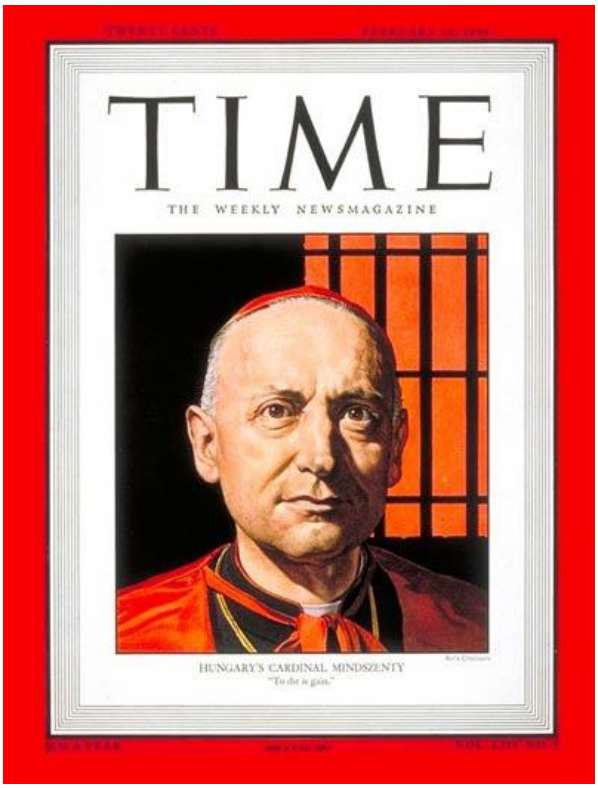
HUNGARY'S CARDINAL MINDSZENTY
"To die is gain."

ONE A YEAR VOL. LIII NO. 7

Wednesday, 04-11-1971 - O Estado de São Paulo

The Cardinal Mindszenty

Lenildo Tabosa Pessoa



Exactly 15 years ago, at 5:20 a.m. on November 4, 1956, Radio Free Kossuth, in Budapest, broadcast a dramatic message in which Prime Minister Imre Nagy said:

"*This is Imre Nagy speaking, President of the Council of Ministers of the Hungarian People's Republic. Today, at dawn, Soviet troops attacked the capital with the evident purpose of overthrowing the democratic and legitimate government of Hungary. Our troops are fighting. The government remains in its position. I inform the country and the entire world of this fact.*"

Imre Nagy

A report prepared by the United Nations on the Hungarian events states that, according to a witness, Nagy's next action was to dictate the following statement:

"*Our struggle is the struggle for the freedom of the Hungarian people against Russian intervention, and it is possible that I may remain at my post for only another hour or two. The whole world will see how the Russian armed forces, contrary to all treaties and conventions, are crushing the resistance of the Hungarian people. They will also see how they kidnap the Prime Minister of a country that is a member state of the United Nations, taking him out of the capital, which will leave no doubt that this is the most brutal form of intervention. In these last moments, I wish to ask the leaders of the revolution to leave the country if they can. I ask that what I said in my appeal be recorded in a memorandum, and everything we agreed with the revolutionary leaders in the meetings in Parliament, and that the leaders seek the help of all the peoples of the world and explain to them that today it is Hungary, but tomorrow or the day after tomorrow it will be the turn of…" other countries, since Moscow's imperialism knows no limits and is only seeking to buy time."*

Twelve years later, Czechoslovak events showed that Imre Nagy was not exaggerating when he said that it would be the turn of other countries (and the fact that there was not the bloodshed in Czechoslovakia that occurred in Hungary does not detract from the prophetic value of his words – as one would say in this post-conciliar era – since this occurred only because the Warsaw Pact troops, who were perfectly prepared to crush the country, encountered no resistance).

If, however, the prediction of the Hungarian prime minister brought to power by the rebellious people was confirmed, the same did not happen with his hopes that the world would become aware of the betrayal and aggression being perpetrated against his country, nor much less that his people would receive help from those who could and should help them.

Fifteen years later, the situation in Hungary is essentially the same as it was when, protected by the darkness of night, Soviet tanks treacherously entered Budapest and massacred the valiant fighters of the Army who, in those dramatic days, placed by events before the dilemma of choosing Soviet imperialism or their own people, chose the people.

Countless Hungarians paid with their lives for the “crime” of having dreamed of the independence of their country, while others, who were able to leave their homeland, still crushed by the memory of the betrayals that plunged the heroic days of the Revolution into blood, can only remember their martyrs and make vows, in the depths of their hearts, that one day Hungary may live the freedom they dreamed of.

Every year, in various parts of the world, Hungarians remember the drama of their country and celebrate the heroism of their people. It would not be an exaggeration to say, however, that this year's commemorations had a note that made them sadder than those of previous years.

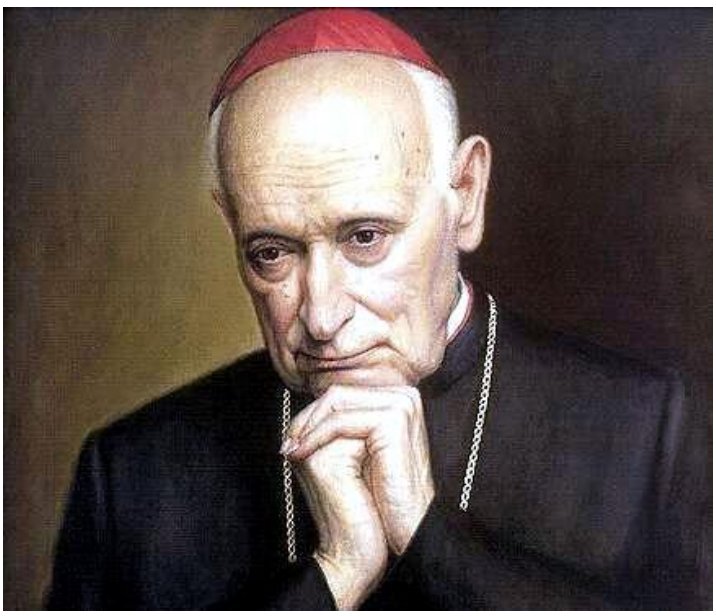
After the Revolution was crushed, Hungarians were able to preserve in their country, despite everything, a symbol of their own resistance and their own hopes.

Cardinal Josef Mindszenty, who had been sentenced to life imprisonment in one of the most notorious trials of the Stalinist era, was freed by the people as soon as the Revolution broke out and, when his country was invaded by Soviet troops, took refuge in the American Embassy in Budapest.

Although he was unable to maintain any contact with his people, his mere presence in his archdiocese had symbolic value. This explains why, from the first moments after the "normalization" of the situation in the country, the regime of Janos Kádár showed interest in getting rid of his troublesome presence.

But these were still the times of Pius XII, who was not afraid to defend the faith and the legitimate rights of the Church, nor was he inclined to transform it into a follower of his enemies.

However, time passes, and from a certain point onward, Cardinal Mindszenty found himself in a situation he certainly never expected to find himself in.



The high hierarchies of the Church, from whom he had reason to expect unconditional support after having sacrificed his entire life to maintain his fidelity to the faith and his vocation, discovered “diplomatic” reasons to become friends and allies of his persecutors, and the intrepid cardinal began to suffer pressure from Rome to play Kadar's game, depriving his people of his presence. While the pressure remained in the realm of “suggestions,” the cardinal intrepidly resisted his new enemies, as he had resisted the old ones before.

Lately, however, the “suggestions” have taken the form of a “paternal ultimatum” and the courageous cardinal, faced with the problem of his obedience to his hierarchical superiors, was forced to yield, having only been able to make it clear to the world that he was making a sacrifice and that he was taking upon his shoulders the heaviest cross of his life.

Capitulations generally present themselves under the deceptive forms of noble gestures made with a view to a higher end. In the case of Cardinal Mindszenty, the official pretext was the same as in previous contacts between the Holy See and the Budapest regime, that is, to create better living conditions for the Catholics of Hungary.

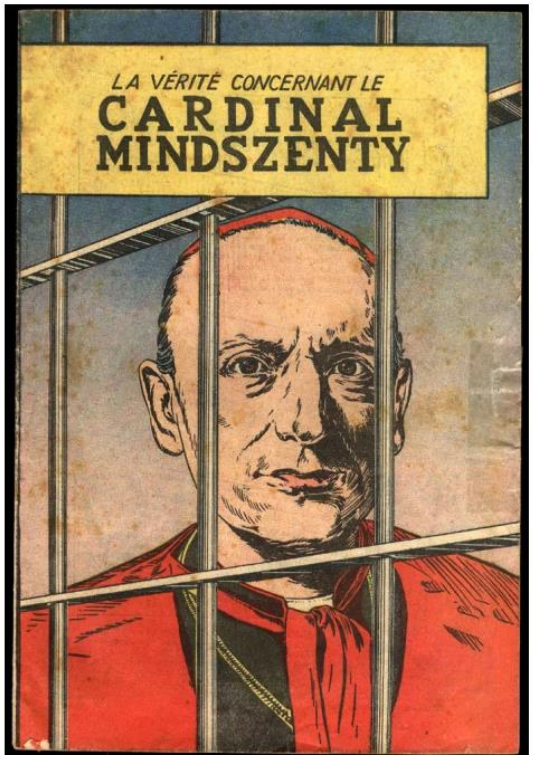
However, it's all just a pretext, and in reality, the repeated contacts and agreements have only served to worsen the situation of Hungarian Catholics, insofar as they show the Budapest regime that they no longer have the moral force that the Holy See still possessed until recently.

The case of Cardinal Mindszenty is, in this regard, extremely – and also tragically – significant. The Vatican yielded to Kadar's wishes to force the cardinal to leave the country without even obtaining Budapest's respect for agreements previously signed.

Priests faithful to the Church continue to be punished for the serious "crime" of teaching catechism, and the cardinal himself was "benefited," less than 48 hours after his departure – which shows Kadar's bad faith in the very agreement regarding his "release" – by an amnesty. In this respect, there was serious confusion in the Western press, and there were those who claimed that Hungary had finally recognized that the cardinal was not guilty. This would have occurred, however, if he had received not an amnesty but a rehabilitation. The cardinal insisted on this point, noting that the regime had rehabilitated people like Lazlo Rajk, recognizing that the trials that condemned them had been entirely based on false evidence.

The regime, however, never agreed to make the same recognition in his case – which showed that its dispositions towards the Church remained the same – and it certainly wouldn't do so at a time when the Vatican was showing itself willing to make the greatest capitulations.

Thus, the intrepid cardinal now finds himself outside Hungary, pardoned, which means that, in the eyes of Budapest, he is a criminal generously pardoned by the State. And, curiously (but in the eyes of Rome it seems perfectly normal), despite being "pardoned," he cannot return to his country.



All this explains why Cardinal Mindszenty, who is certainly not a Casaroli nor a Benelli, preferred not to stay in Rome and, when least expected, arrived in Vienna, abandoning the Tower of San Giovanni, where he had been paternally confined after his "liberation."